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Population and housing censuses

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-ninth session (see E/2008/24). It contains information about activities completed in respect of the implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses in general, including the conduct of an expert group meeting and training workshops; the dissemination of the second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*; the development of a website to serve as a census knowledge base; and the development of a software package, CensusInfo, to help countries disseminate census data. It also contains information on future activities related to the 2010 World Programme. The Commission is requested to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2009/1.

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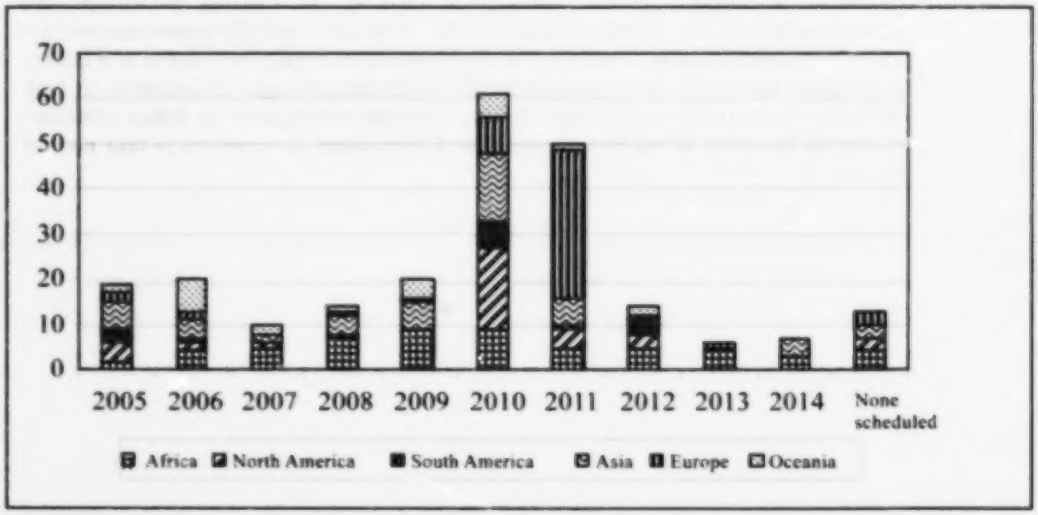
I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-eighth session (see E/2007/24), the Statistical Commission requested the United Nations Statistics Division and other international agencies to increase their technical assistance to national statistical offices in order to strengthen national capacity for the implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. In addition, the Commission requested countries to begin implementation of the revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

II. Implementation of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses

2. By the end of 2008, 64 countries or areas, representing 21 per cent of the world population, will have undertaken a census. In 2008, a census was successfully conducted in Liberia after 23 years and in the Sudan after 14 years. In addition, in the current round, a census has been successfully conducted in Bhutan after 24 years and in Nigeria and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea after 15 years. Nevertheless, 13 countries or areas, representing less than 2 per cent of the world population have not indicated whether they are going to conduct a census. Although the situation already seems to be better than it was during the previous census round (1995-2004), some concern remains. For example, a few countries, especially in Africa, have postponed their census from 2008 to 2009 owing to budget constraints. The following figure shows the reported census dates by number of countries, regions and census year.

2010 census round dates



III. Activities of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses

3. Following the publication of the second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the Division carried out activities aimed at advancing the implementation of the 2010 World Programme. They included the dissemination of the revised census recommendations; the development of international census guidelines; the conduct of an expert group meeting and five training workshops; the development of a software package, CensusInfo, to help countries disseminate census data; and the inclusion on the Division website of an interactive database of topics relating to questions asked in national censuses.

A. International census guidelines

4. The second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* has been published in print form, and an online version is available on the Division website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/census3.htm. The publication has been submitted for translation from English into the other five official languages of the United Nations.

5. The *Handbook On Geographic Information Systems And Digital Mapping*, which was issued for use in the 2000 round of population and housing censuses, has been reviewed and updated to take into account recent technological developments in the geographic information area in terms of not only geospatial technologies (geographical information systems, global positioning systems, remote sensing, Internet mapping, et cetera), but, more broadly, approaches to the use of geospatial applications for statistical exercises in general, and population and housing censuses, in particular. These developments have been reflected in the second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, which was adopted by the Statistical Commission in March 2007. The revised handbook will provide census planners and related personnel with technical guidelines on the contemporary methods, tools and best practices that will enable them to better articulate their needs and deal with census mapping operations more efficiently.

B. Expert group meeting

6. An expert group meeting was held in New York from 7 to 19 April 2008 to review the draft handbook on geographic databases and census mapping. The purpose of the meeting was to critically review the draft handbook in terms of the use of geospatial tools in support of census activities. The draft is a revision of the *Handbook on Geographic Information Systems and Digital Mapping* produced to support the activities of the 2000 World Programme. The handbook provides detailed technical and operational guidelines relating to recent developments in technology, methods and standardization in the area of geographic information and census mapping.

C. Training workshops

7. Seven training workshops were conducted by the Division in 2008, in collaboration with the relevant regional commissions and subregional organizations.

8. A workshop for the Pacific region on international standards, contemporary technologies and regional cooperation was held in Noumea, New Caledonia, from 4 to 8 February 2008. The purpose of the workshop was to present international standards for conducting population and housing censuses, including the revised census recommendations, as well as to highlight the significant capabilities of contemporary technologies and their use in census mapping activities and data capture. It was also designed to provide an opportunity for exploring ways of strengthening regional cooperation in establishing joint ventures during various stages of population and housing censuses in the region.

9. Four workshops were organized on contemporary technologies for data capture and the methodology and practice of data editing. The objective of the workshops was to present international standards for processing population and housing censuses and to highlight the significant additional capabilities of contemporary technologies and their use for census data capture and editing. In addition, the workshops offered participants the opportunity to exchange experiences in census data processing. The workshops were held in:

(a) Doha, from 18 to 22 May 2008, for the countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region;

(b) Dar es Salaam, from 9 to 13 June 2008, for the English-speaking African countries;

(c) Bangkok, from 15 to 19 September 2008, for the Asian countries;

(d) Bamako, from 3 to 7 November 2008, for the French-speaking African countries.

10. Two additional workshops were held, in Santiago, from 24 to 27 November 2008, for the Latin American countries; and in Minsk, from 8 to 12 December 2008, for the countries members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The purpose of the Santiago workshop was to highlight the significant additional capabilities of geographic information systems and other geospatial technologies in census mapping activities, including preparations for enumeration, enumeration operations, analysis and dissemination of census data, and provide information on how to effectively use the relevant technologies. The objective of the Minsk workshop was to present international standards for conducting population and housing censuses and to highlight the significant capabilities of contemporary technologies and their use in census mapping and data capture.

11. The Division carries out follow-up activities aimed at monitoring the implementation by countries of workshop recommendations. It also sponsors study visits among countries, thereby facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience of various census activities.

D. Programme website

12. The Division continued work on the website of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses as part of its activities for the Programme (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/census2010.htm). The website provides updated information and news about country activities related to census-taking in the 2010 census round, including national census dates and questionnaires that have been used in various censuses. In addition, the website provides information on census meetings and workshops organized by the Division and other organizations of the United Nations system.

13. One of the important aspects of the website is the census knowledge base that it provides, which serves as a repository of census methodology and documents pertaining to best practices of countries in census-taking. To date, the knowledge base contains more than 300 articles on activities related to census-taking. The Division will soon add an online technical publication on guidelines for reporting census operations and activities.

14. As part of the exchange of information and reporting on census activities, the Division publishes a periodic newsletter, the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme Newsletter, which is available at the website.

15. In addition to working with the regional commissions, the Division continued to work closely with such international agencies as the World Bank, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

E. CensusInfo 2010

16. Work on the development of a software package, CensusInfo 2010, was initiated in 2008 in collaboration with DevInfo, UNICEF and UNFPA, to assist countries in disseminating census results on the website and CD-ROM. In order to make CensusInfo 2010 more compatible with existing data processing and analysis software, including CSPro and REDATAM, sample data sets were obtained from countries with a view to developing an interface with such software. A CensusInfo 2010 website has been set up and a prototype developed, which was discussed at a technical review meeting in New York in November 2008.

F. Estimated national needs for the implementation of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses

17. Under the auspices of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, and in relation to national plans for the implementation of censuses conducted during the 2010 round, the Division launched an initiative to track, over time, the activities and resource requirements of all the countries of the world in order to better serve the needs of countries intending to conduct censuses in the 2010 round. More specifically, the Division requested from national statistical offices information on projected census dates; planned census activities over the years of the round; overall financial requirements as well as breakdowns by activity and by source; potential donor sources; and technical assistance needs and offerings. More than 130 countries responded. On the basis of the information collected, a paper has been written to present, inter alia, global and regional information on

overall census costs; total and median census costs per capita; percentage national investment in total census budget; and percentage of total budget by census activity. The paper is posted on the knowledge base. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/censuskb/article.aspx?id=10491&cNode=6S5F1P.

IV. Future activities

18. A range of census-related activities are planned for 2009, including those listed in paragraphs 19 to 28 below:

Monitoring country activities related to censuses

19. As part of the activities to monitor the implementation of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, the Division will publish information on the progress made by countries in conducting population and housing censuses. The major goal of the 2010 World Programme is to ensure that all countries and areas conduct a population and housing census at least once during the decade 2005-2014. Consequently, the primary objective of monitoring national census activities is to set up an alert system to identify the status of census-taking in various countries. Information on national census dates will continue to be published on the Division website (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/census2010.htm). A new feature in the context of the monitoring of census-taking will be a graphic display on the website showing the proportion of countries conducting a census in the 2010 round. Identifying difficulties that countries may face in implementing the 2010 World Programme will help to ensure proper and timely support during the various phases of census preparation and conduct. The findings will be brought to the attention of the international community in an attempt to generate support and attract donors.

20. As part of the monitoring of the 2010 census round, the Division will also maintain a database indicating the status of implementation of the recommended topics, as described in the second revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

Technical guidelines and handbooks

21. The Division will continue to produce guidelines and technical materials pertaining to the various census phases. Work will continue on the preparation of reference and training materials on topics critical to the 2010 World Programme. The strategy is to focus each year on successive stages of the census process, thereby enabling the Division to update and/or develop guidelines and best practices in a rational way. Materials used in workshops will be refined and adapted to online training materials for use by a wider audience. In this connection, material on census mapping and geographic information systems and census data capture and editing will be posted online.

22. Many countries do not evaluate their censuses for coverage and content error, or do so in a very limited fashion. One reason is the fact that the requisite skills and technical knowledge regarding evaluation methods are limited, specifically with respect to post-enumeration surveys. In recognition of that fact, the Division is drafting technical guidelines that synthesize the critical elements that countries need to take into consideration when planning and conducting a post-enumeration survey. The guidelines will cover, inter alia, the following topics: an overview of the

various methods of evaluating a census (including a post-enumeration survey) and their strengths and weaknesses; sample survey designs; matching rules; dual system estimation; and suggested tabulations. The guidelines will also illustrate the various steps, using best practice examples from countries that have recently conducted a survey.

23. The Division will also collect and make available information on national best practices related to quality assurance for the census. It is anticipated that broad guidelines on quality assurance will be developed on the basis of the material on best practices.

Training workshops

24. In 2009, the Division will focus on training workshops covering quality assurance and census evaluation, including post-enumeration surveys. In addition, the workshops will cover modules of such special topics as measuring economic activity and disability through censuses.

Development of a software package for census information dissemination

25. Work on the development, finalization and dissemination of CensusInfo will continue in 2009. There will be further consultations with countries in order to test the new software package.

Documenting national best practices and alternative census designs

26. Traditional/conventional censuses are still the most popular methodologies for many countries; however, some countries are adopting or planning for new approaches in census-taking, including the rolling census, the virtual census, the register-based census and the re-engineered census. The Division will monitor those new developments and methodologies for elaboration and dissemination on the Division website. Emphasis will be placed on discussing the conditions necessary for such methodologies to yield reliable data, and the prospects for portability to other countries.

Maintenance of the resource centre on the Internet

27. Information on activities posted on the website will be continually updated in 2009 and additional documents will be added to the knowledge base. It is hoped that there will be active participation on the part of member countries in using the available documents and providing information for inclusion on the website.

Technical assistance and study tours

28. Technical assistance missions will be undertaken to provide country-specific support. The aim of the missions will be to strengthen the capacity of countries in conducting censuses. Study tours will also be arranged to foster and enhance South-South cooperation and the sharing of experiences among countries.

V. Recommendation

29. The Commission may wish to take note of the present report.